



City of Somerville
PLANNING BOARD
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

1 APRIL 2021 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Sam Dinning	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Rob Buchanan	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Charlotte Leis (Planning & Zoning), and Sarah Lewis (Planning & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 8:15pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 71-72 Union Square

Attorney Adam Dash provided a summary of the proposal, discussing design, program, and physical features, noting that the building would include a green roof and make a payment in lieu of providing open space on the site. Mr Dash noted that letters of support had been submitted by Councilor Ballantyne, Councilor Scott, and Councilor Ewen-Campen.

Will Chalfant of Khalsa Design provided a more detailed discussion of the landscape and building plans, and discussed the team's process with the Urban Design Commission and the resulting design decisions. Details were provided for the mural to be installed to enliven the blank wall facing the adjacent building at 75 Union Square

Steve Siragusa of DCI provided an overview and discussion of the project's Transportation Impact Study, Transportation Access Plan, and Mobility Management Plan.

Greg Santos of Union Leaf, with the assistance of their security consultant Rick Nagle, discussed planned operations and the team's security plans and measures.

The Board and the applicant team discussed the evolution of the design in general, the lobby space, opportunities for local art, public access to the second and third floors, and the plan for the loading zone and deliveries.

The Board consulted with staff regarding fenestration requirements and asking about the Board's scope for offering relief. Mr Dash noted that the team had initially applied to the ZBA for a variance to deviate from fenestration requirements but subsequently redesigned the project to conform to zoning standards.

Chair Capuano opened the hearing for public testimony.

Ann Tate (140 Sycamore): was having audio challenges, so she noted that she would submit a written comment.

Jessica Eschleman (366 Somerville Ave): is the Executive Director of Union Square Main Streets and was following up her previously provided written comment. Ms. Eschleman strongly supported this project

and asked that the Board please advance this swiftly as this will bring customers to other Union Square businesses, as well as local jobs for tax revenue.

Chair Capuano closed verbal public testimony. Written public testimony was left open until noon on Friday April 9th.

The Board requested a visual perspective from other angle of how the new building abuts the Police Station.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted (5-0) to continue to April 15, 2021.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 120-132 Middlesex Avenue

Joe Hanley (attorney) provided an overview of the project team and goals. Ed Doherty, Bradley Hall, Kyle Greaves, Shauna Gillies-Smith, Ginger Desmond, and BK Boley were also present for the applicant team.

Mr Boley discussed the permits requested, noting that the project required both a Master Plan Special Permit and subsequent Site Plan Approvals, and detailed the proposed building program and parking. Mr Boley also discussed plans for improving Middlesex Avenue in keeping with the vision put forward by the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan.

Shauna Gillies-Smith presented the proposal's circulation and access plan, and the proposed streetscape design concept.

Mr Hanley noted public benefits expected to be produced by the project, from permanent jobs to expected tax contributions, and discussed the sustainability and resiliency features of the proposal. Mr Hanley also discussed improvements to be made to Middlesex Avenue, and the proposal's alignment with the vision presented in the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan.

Chair Capuano reiterated for the benefit of all in attendance that, as a Master Plan Special Permit, this approval requires different considerations and findings than does an application for Site Plan Approval, which would follow the MPSP if approved. He discussed the details of the proposal in the context of the City's SomerVision Comprehensive Plan and the surrounding neighborhood context, and noted that the additional height requested was in keeping with surrounding buildings, the Neighborhood Plan, and the proximity of the highway.

Chair Capuano asked for questions or comments from the Board. Board members declined to provide comments in advance of public testimony.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Joe Tagliente (96 Middlesex Ave): is one of the principal partners at Cage Capital Partners (neighboring property owners – 99 Restaurant and La Quinta Hotel) and he was very much in support of project.

Wig Zamore (13 Highland Ave): noted that the Mystic View was highly in favor of the live/work balance in Somerville. He appreciated attention to air pollution, like the MERV-16 air filtration. He was comfortable with the scale and height, but wanted to note that large flat walls may be reflective and impact neighbors.

He liked the maker space, but who will manage it? It's one thing to propose it, another thing to execute it well. Should we be trying to find group that supports creative economy beyond artists? Mystic View is interested in bringing people interested in Mystic River Watershed / water front to Assembly; so he would like to encourage attention on the waterfront. He felt that developments larger than the FAR permitted should be asked to contribute proportionally to their GreenScore. He did appreciate the underground garage. If there's a way of separating bicyclists from pedestrians and traffic with a thick hedge that would be great; considering air pollution is a major health issue. He hoped that a local business will be considered for the ground floor space.

Anne Tate (140 Sycamore Street): was in support of the proposal. She felt that the building looked a little bulky, but knows it's at the beginning of a long process. Given the FAR and the massing of the building, it seems to have totally maximized the built space, so she was wondering if there was a way to have the developer contribute to open space in other parts of Assembly Square to make up for the lack of open space they are not providing.

Chair Capuano closed the public testimony portion of public hearing. Written public testimony was left open until noon on Friday April 9th.

The Board and applicant team discussed the organizations/tenants being displaced from the current space. They also consulted with staff regarding the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan and the potential for a connecting thoroughfare between McGrath and Middlesex. Director Lewis noted that this possibility had not been raised as part of the Assembly Square Master Plan process, but that the plan is not complete. Ms. Lewis confirmed that anything to do with Fellsway and McGrath Highway would need to be coordinated with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and that the intersection spacing may make such a proposal unfeasible. She indicated that she will look into the issue and report back to the Board.

The Board and the applicant team also discussed the possibility of making accommodations in the ground floor of the building for a community space or indoor civic space, since the building is more massive than it would've been if a Hardship Variance to provide a payment in lieu of onside open space had not been granted.

Mr. Handley noted that the building does not take up the entire site, as the proposal included an alley providing access to the parking and loading areas.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue to April 15, 2021.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Hiring Consultants Under M.G.L. Ch. 44, Sec. 53G

Director Lewis reported that there are already rules and regulations approved for the Board which provide for hiring consultants, and noted that the next stage in the process would be to finalize a scope of work for the Board's review and approval, along with an estimate of the cost of work. She hopes to have that work completed for the Board's next meeting.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.